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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FINAL GAB WITH FOREIGN MINISTRY

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Classified By: Political Counselor, Robert Richard Downes
for Reason 1.4(b) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary - In a farewell meeting BRV Vice Foreign Minister Valero and Ambassador discussed five possible avenues for an early dialogue between the BRV and the Ambassador's successor. The Ambassador noted that long-standing difficulties involving official visas and accreditation, aviation and prisoner transfers could and should be resolved at the technical level. While more difficult to address, more cooperative work and dialogue is needed on counternarcotics efforts. A process of identifying points of contact for discussions in these areas and on other issues of reciprocity might move the process along. Ambassador noted that at some point the U.S. request to reopen a Consulate (APP) in Maracaibo, and the BRV's last minute decision to revoke arms permits for Diplomatic Security Agents working to protect the U.S. soccer team in the Copa America tournament, would need to be addressed. The Vice Foreign Minister did not signal he expected rapid progress would be made on most of these and other outstanding differences between the two governments. End Summary.

12. (C) On July 2 the Ambassador accompanied by the Public Affairs Counselor (and ADCM), Political and Economic Counselors and the Consul General met with Vice Minister for Popular Power for Foreign Relations (MFA) for North American and Multilateral Affairs and BRV Ambassador to the Organization for American States, Jorge Valero, MFA Director for North American Affairs and Multilateral Affairs, Yaneth Arocha, MFA Director for Consular Affairs, Coromoto Godoy Calderon and other MFA officials. The meeting had been postponed several times over the past six weeks. The Ambassador noted his and Ambassador-designate Patrick Duddy's June 28 Senate confirmation and his departure now scheduled for July 5. Ambassador and Valero covered a number of outstanding issues that would benefit from closer dialogue, particularly at the technical level, and suggested the arrival of a new Ambassador might be an opportune time to move forward.

13. (C) The two discussed five areas. The long-standing difficulties over the short validity of and long processing times for official visas and credentials should be relatively straight forward to resolve if the two sides could get beyond finger pointing and focus on a pragmatic approach. Valero thought that it appeared to be an area where some progress

could be made and agreed to, as he has in the past, look into the issue further. (Comment: Valero's staff, which travel frequently, are among the strongest advocates for a solution to this issue, yet seem unable to solve the problem. End comment)

¶4. (C) The two agreed a second area that needed attention was aviation, and recalled the category I certification near crisis of last year. They noted there were significant outstanding issues involving security assessments and route adjustments (reftel). The Economic Counselor indicated that we were prepared to work cooperatively with the BRV on these issues. He pointed out that despite numerous requests for meetings and information current BRV aviation authorities have chosen not to respond. Valero said he would reach out to the National Institute of Civil Aviation (INAC), particularly its President and see if a way might be found to move forward on some of these issues.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador noted problems with the transfer of prisoners between the United States and Venezuela. Since taking Office, Minister for Popular Power for Interior and Justice (MIJ) Pedro Carreno has apparently not approved any prisoner transfers for any country. There are three American prisoners awaiting approval for transfer and reportedly 25 Venezuelan prisoners in the United States wanting to return home under the program. The Consul General has raised the issue with Vice Interior Minister Rafael Dan Jimenez, but so far to no avail. Valero said he would contact MIJ and see if there was anything the MFA could do to move the process forward.

¶6. (C) Valero and the Ambassador discussed the possibility of identifying working groups to resolve outstanding issues on the reciprocity front. Valero thought there was merit in the idea and he would see if there might be some way to set up a bilateral group to discuss or identify issues to be addressed

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at the technical level.

¶7. (C) Ambassador and Valero discussed cooperation on counternarcotics, an extremely important problem for both countries. The Ambassador pointed out that the USG currently had USD two million available in NAS funding that could be used for cooperative counternarcotics efforts, such as training, education or equipment. It could not be spent without a BRV counterpart. Valero said he would contact the National Anti-drug Organization (ONA) to see if it could be a cooperative counterpart.

¶8. (C) The Ambassador pointed to two other issues that needed to be addressed. He emphasized that at some point the BRV would need to respond to our April 2006 request to reopen the Consulate (APP) in Maracaibo and he urged the BRV not to wait until the last minute, say the expected travel of President Chavez to the United Nations General Assembly, to clarify its policy on requests for permits to carry arms. (Note: In June the BRV first approved and then revoked 14 permits for Department of State Diplomatic Security Agents to carry arms in Venezuela as part of the program to provide protection to the American soccer team participating in the Copa America tournament. The Embassy subsequently asked the MFA to clarify its policy on issuing arms permits. End note.) Valero responded that the BRV was making a distinction between "official visits" and those -- as in the case of the Copa team -- that were not governmental. Arocha also noted that the weapons permits had been revoked for all countries during the Copa America tournament, not just for the American agents. The Ambassador encouraged the BRV to provide a formal response to our request for clarification.

¶9. (C) Comment: VFM Valero was professional and cordial as were the members of his team. While agreeing that progress should be made in several areas, a statement the MFA has made at senior levels since the December 2006 Presidential

elections (and subsequent efforts at dialogue), we will believe it when we see it.

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